

quite within the range of *elegans*, which sometimes has nineteen, and occasionally seventeen rows; and as in the remaining details of scutellation, as well as in other characters distinctive of *elegans*, such as the yellow chin and throat, the usually short hinder chin-shields, and the frequent presence of red markings on the ventrals, there is complete agreement, it seems that these snakes must be regarded as specimens of *E. elegans*, showing a more or less uniform dark olive color with a wide yellow dorsal stripe and little or no indication of laterals, correlated with a tendency to a reduced number of scale rows, and occurring, as far as is known, in a restricted area. Such a form requires recognition as a subspecies, for which the proper name obviously is *Eutænia elegans atrata* Kenn. Cope's name *E. infernalis vidua* being a pure synonym.

Anomalies such as these, occurring in some numbers and over a period of at least some generations, belong to the mutations of De Vries, but their proper assignment to any one of his special categories of the constituent parts of species is not so clear. It was pointed out on a previous occasion that *E. sirtalis*, with nineteen rows of scales, is probably the parent species of the genus, in which case the occasional appearance of that number in a species normally possessing twenty-one rows might be, in De Vries' view, an outbreak of a tendency to specific reversion to that number, and would fall under the definition of atavistic or degressive varieties; but, on the other hand, it is difficult to show, and would indeed be impossible when there is no knowledge of the line of descent, that the case may be no more than individual loss of two rows, a view to which color is lent by the further reduction in three specimens to seventeen rows. This mode of change would class them as retrogressive varieties. And again, the gain of a new color-pattern, occurring nowhere in a possibly ancestral form, brings them within the definition of elementary species. In fact, these specimens seem to demonstrate the lack of value of these theoretical definitions to the practical work of the systematist.

The evidence for the evolutionary value of mutations being so scanty among animals, it is not amiss to direct attention to the instability of nearly the whole genus *Eutænia*, and especially the species of the Pacific coast. This condition suggests that if the theory of alternating periods of stability and mutation be well founded, this group of species may at the present time be passing through a period of extreme mutability.

OCTOBER 17.

The President, SAMUEL G. DIXON M.D., in the Chair.

Forty-two persons present.

The death of Sutherland M. Prevost, a member, September 30, 1905, was announced.

The Publication Committee reported the reception of a paper entitled "Catalogue of the Land and Fresh-water Mollusca of Taiwan (Formosa) with descriptions of new species," by Henry A. Pilsbry and Y. Hirase. (October 9.)

DR. BENJAMIN SHARP made a communication on oyster culture, native and foreign, illustrated by lantern slides. (No abstract.)

Alexander Wilson's Tombstone.—MR. NATHANIEL E. JANNEY remarked that on his first visit in 1862 to the grave of Alexander Wilson in the Old Swedes' Churchyard on Water street, north of Washington avenue in this city, the inscription was entirely legible, but from year to year by the action of the elements it had grown more and more indistinct, until, on the occasion of a visit last month, it was found to be almost obliterated.

Obtaining the consent of a warden of the church he employed a stone-cutter who resurfaced the stone and renewed the original inscription which reads as follows:

This Monument
Covers the remains of
ALEXANDER WILSON
Author of the
American Ornithology
He was born in Renfrewshire, Scotland
on the 6th of July, 1766.
Emigrated to the United States
in the year 1794.
and died in Philadelphia
of the dysentery
on the 23rd August, 1813
Aged 47.
Ingenio stat sine morte decus.

The Latin line is not given by Ord in his *Life of Wilson*.

Ezra T. Cresson, Jr., and Rev. J. A. Tomlinson were elected members.

The following were ordered to be printed: